

## Performing entrepreneurial masculinity

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## **Performing entrepreneurial masculinity: an ethnographic account**

**Abstract**

To date, little energy has been spent on understanding the empirical relationship between masculinity, hegemony and entrepreneurial identity. This article addresses this omission by outlining how ten enterprising men who own and run small-businesses perform, in the Goffmanesque sense, a style of ‘entrepreneurial masculinity’ in front of each other during their leisure lives when they meet as a local entrepreneurial fraternity in a semi-rural pub. By so doing, we expand upon prevailing ideas about how male actors perform entrepreneurial identity and develop ethnographic accounts of how gender, entrepreneurship and identity projection culturally intersect.

**Keywords:** Gender; entrepreneurial identity; Goffman; dramaturgical performance; masculinity.

## **Introduction**

According to the feminist critique of entrepreneurship research, male entrepreneurs, particularly when white and middle-class, enjoy a cultural hegemony and sense of normalness in their ‘entrepreneurial identities’ (Down and Giazitzoglu, 2014) and actions that female entrepreneurs do not experience (see Ogbor, 2000; Nicholson and Anderson, 2005; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Yet, studies into how masculinity, entrepreneurial identity and cultural hegemony relate and intersect in enterprising men’s lives are uncommon. More work is needed to explore what sort of identity white, middle-class male entrepreneurs define as hegemonic and, latently, how enterprising men reproduce an identity they deem to be hegemonic in their own lives, upon their own persons and through their conversational narratives (see Bruni et al., 2004; Pullen and Simpson, 2009 and Smith, 2010 for rare insights into the identities of male entrepreneurs). It is assumed that the identities of white, male entrepreneurs are, non-problematically, normative. Yet, nuanced questions that address how they negotiate and ‘live’ (Berglund, 2007) their supposedly normative entrepreneurial identities are largely unaddressed. This limits attempts to read ‘how gender and entrepreneurship are culturally produced and reproduced in social practices’ (Bruni et al., 2004: 406) and should be addressed for the ‘more refined understanding of entrepreneurship and gender’ called for by Hamilton (2014: 703) to emerge. Here, our objective is to provide an empirical corrective, that demonstrates how a cohort of white, male entrepreneurs perform a style of masculinity which, they believe, gives their entrepreneurial identities a level of legitimacy and authenticity.

Existing studies that focus on the sociological relationship between ‘gender’, hegemony and entrepreneurial identity have typically analysed female entrepreneurs, not male entrepreneurs

(Brush, 1992; Hamilton, 2006; Nadin, 2007; Marlow et al., 2009; Roper and Scott, 2009; Diaz-Garcia and Welter, 2011: 385; Marlow and McAdam, 2012; McAdam, 2012). Thus, we know much about how enterprising women subjectively experience and define the intersection of their identity, gender and entrepreneurship. Yet little is known about enterprising men in this regard. It is an ironic parody of the invisible women thesis inherent in much extant work into gender and entrepreneurship that the relationship between entrepreneurial identity and masculinity remains largely unexplored, even ‘invisible’ (Bruni et al., 2004: 407). Thus, there is clear scope for the relationship between masculinity and entrepreneurial identity to be empirically analysed.

In response, this article examines the way a distinct style of entrepreneurial masculinity is negotiated and ‘performed’ by a group of white, self-employed male business owners when they routinely meet in a semi-rural pub in the North East of England (*The Magpie*, a pseudonym). To contextualize our analysis we, like Anderson and Warren (2011: 604; see also Reveley et al., 2004) employ Goffman’s (1959) term performance, to document how contemporary enterprising people assert an aspect of their entrepreneurial identity through conversations, learned behaviours and dramaturgical rituals. Performance is thus defined as ‘all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (Goffman, 1959: 32). Goffman views public social spaces or ‘front regions’ (ibid: 110-114) as analogous to theatrical stages. Participants function as social actors on the stages they inhabit, and purposefully enact distinctive roles to their audiences or ‘observers’ as part of their performances. In order to perform roles with authority and legitimacy, actors employ ‘dramaturgical principles’,

‘impression management’, ‘mystification’ (ibid: 68) and ‘fronts’, thus ensuring their performances contain ‘a set of abstract stereotypical expectations’ (ibid: 40).

*The Magpie* pub is such a ‘front region’ where male participants routinely meet as members of a local entrepreneurial fraternity (Warren and Smith, 2009) to socialize and network (Smith, 2011) in their attempts to be seen as authentic, legitimate entrepreneurs. The first named author conducted ethnographic research in order to understand how ten enterprising males ‘do’, ‘accomplish’ (Bruni et al, 2004) and enact an entrepreneurial masculine identity when they meet in *The Magpie*. To fulfill our objective, here we aim to, firstly, show how the men behaviourally and conversationally practice dramaturgical principles, impression management and other aspects of Goffman’s conceptual palette to project an entrepreneurial masculine identity that they see as hegemonic and legitimate and, secondly, explore what is relevant about participants’ performances to debates in gender and entrepreneurship more broadly.

We structure our paper as follows. Next we position masculinity as a social construct and outline the problematic way masculinity has been theorized by entrepreneurship scholars. We then explain the methodological and data-analytic procedures we adopted, before presenting and discussing the manner in which our participants performed masculine identity. Finally our concluding discussion examines our broader theoretical contribution.

### **Performing masculinity**

The performance of masculinity is a temporally situated social construct (Butler, 1990). Analysing how men fleetingly perform masculine roles defined by violence, and the potential to

physically hurt other men, at different points in their life-courses makes this clear. Violence is assumed to be one of the most uncivilized, uncontrollable and primal features of masculinity (see Giulianotti's 1995 ethnographic insight into the violence performed by male football hooligans). Yet even violence is something men can seemingly consciously dramaturgically perform and enact. This is illustrated by Abramson and Modzelewski's (2011) account of how middle-class males who enact violent, 'immoral' roles while cage-fighting are able to perform 'moral', 'respectable' roles in their homes and workplaces, thus switching the form of masculinity they perform almost instantaneously. Similarly, De Viggiani (2012) demonstrates how men who may not have performed in a threatening way before incarceration enact a 'hyper-violent' masculine performance in their everyday lives as soon as they enter a prison. Giazitzoglu (2014) highlights how an aspirational group of men from semi-rural, working-class households display expensive commodities and socialize in upmarket urban bars and restaurants in order to enact a version of masculinity they deem 'middle-class', and distance their identities from their potentially violent, working-class peers. These studies, among many others (synthesised in Bly, 2001 and Whitehead and Barrett, 2001), demonstrate that men consciously perform radically different masculine roles in order to comply with the expectations and conventions imposed upon them by the social 'stages' they inhabit and the different audiences they face. Masculinity is not a natural, intrinsic state. Rather, it is a relative, socially constructed, performed and learned identity enactment (Kimmel, 2005).

### **Hegemonic masculinity**

The sociology of masculinity has employed the term hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1985; 1995) to refer to the socially preferred and dominant style of masculinity that exists in a given space and time. Epistemologically, hegemonic masculinity has functioned as the primary theory in gender studies to account for the identities and behaviours of men and masculinities over the last thirty years (Reed, 2013: 908). The notion of hegemonic masculinity carries an innate power assumption: what is deemed hegemonic and accordingly enacted by men in a given space and time is seen as more powerful than the subordinated, alternative versions of masculinity that exist alongside it. Thus, the socially mobile men identified by Giazitzoglu (2014) attempt to enact middle-class masculinity as they see this as dominant and superior to the working-class masculinity they once enacted. However, knowing how to project a form of masculinity that is hegemonic is potentially difficult. Accordingly, Butler (1990) asserts that the performance of the ‘correct’ style of gender is an achievement, especially bearing in mind the multiple sorts of gender performances one may enact and the time it takes for one to ‘learn’ how to perform gender roles.

Epistemologically, notions of hegemonic masculinity remain under-researched and under-theorized in the study of entrepreneurship (as argued by Bruni et al., 2004: 410). This is surprising given the extent to which entrepreneurs and managers share similar status and functions (Watson, 1995; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2007) and the degree to which hegemonic masculinity has been explored by organizational and management scholars (Roper, 1994; Collinson and Hearn, 1996). This is not to suggest that male entrepreneurs have been entirely absent from empirical investigations. Insights into male entrepreneurs based on ethnographic data do exist (Hobbs, 1998; Down, 2006; Anderson and Warren, 2011). However, such



investigations ‘are based on the experience of men, which, however, well done perpetuates a view of entrepreneurship that does not acknowledge gender’ (Hamilton, 2013: 94). In other words, extant ethnographic research has used the experiences and narratives of enterprising men to address themes that are ultimately autonomous from questions explicitly linked to masculinity and entrepreneurship. For example, Hobbs’ work into entrepreneurship in London’s East End is interested in criminology, not gender. Hobbs recognises that criminal ‘members of this entrepreneurial culture will attempt to cultivate a specific style, a front that will single him out as someone with something to sell, as a dealer’ (Hobbs, 1988: 142). Yet, Hobbs does not analyse how the performance, enactment and cultivation of such a style of masculinity occurs, or what this enactment means in relation to how criminal entrepreneurs define hegemonic masculinity. Hence, work like Hobbs’ is guilty of re-enforcing the gender blindness that exists in the field (see Hamilton’s, 2013, critique of Down, 2006). Existing work fails, firstly, to ‘study how gender is accomplished rather than study what it is’ (Ahl, 2004: 192) and, secondly, to consider the accomplishment of a gendered entrepreneurial identity in relation to gender theory; by which, in this work, we mean the theory of hegemonic masculinity.

There are, however, two key studies that do consider how gender and entrepreneurship are accomplished, which we aim to build on here, though neither have an explicit focus on masculinity. The first of these studies is Greene et al.’s (2013), which describes how self-employed female actors engage with ‘gender stereotypes’ (especially stereotypes about male entrepreneurs), in the hope of performing their roles as entrepreneurs with a greater level of credibility. Greene et al. define gender stereotypes as ‘heuristic devices constructed from situated cues that prescribe the behaviours, values, and actions that males and females perform ... if they

are to be recognized as credible social actors' (2013: 689). As well as showing the extent to which gender stereotypes impact the behavior of the female entrepreneurs they analysed, Greene et al. call for further work to emerge, which 'generate in-depth contextualized accounts of how stereotypes are transmitted and transferred into social roles' (2013: 706).

We build on Greene et al.'s work by treating masculinity, or more specifically a hegemonic, entrepreneurial masculine identity, as a constructed, heuristic device that men enact in *The Magpie* in their attempts to appear credible and legitimate. We look at how a style of entrepreneurial masculinity has been defined by participants, and become an embedded, normative and expected part of their performances, when the men try to project a public entrepreneurial identity that is authentic and respectable. Our analysis also considers what happens when enterprising males in *The Magpie* fail to adhere to localized notions of hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity in their identity projections. We thereby provide the sort of qualitative, in-depth analysis of role assimilation, gender and entrepreneurship called for by Greene and his colleagues.

The second study we build on, both ontologically in terms of how we treat gender, and methodologically in terms of how it is researched, is Bruni et al.'s ethnographic account, which examines two small enterprises in Italy to explore 'how gender and entrepreneurship are culturally produced and reproduced in social practices' (2004: 406). Like Bruni et al. we see 'gender and entrepreneurship as practical accomplishments' (2004: 426) that are performed. How the performance of gender and entrepreneurship is accomplished in *The Magpie* is the crux of our analysis. However, while Bruni et al. consider the accomplishment of gender and

masculinity in multiple spaces where formal entrepreneurial behaviours occur and in relation to both 'intertwining' male and female actors, we examine the accomplishment of gender in one distinctive, informal space and purely in relation to masculinity. This facilitates a new, empirically rigorous insight into how entrepreneurial masculinity is performed by men, when those men are performing for other men, largely away from the female gaze.

An assumption implicit in Bruni et al.'s study, and the literature more broadly (Ahl and Marlow, 2012), is that a standard, accepted hegemonic masculine entrepreneurial identity exists, which enterprising agents comply with (or fail to comply with as the case is for Bruni et al.'s subjects) via their performances (Marlow and Swail, 2014). Here we go back to first principles by considering what, exactly, entrepreneurial masculinity is and how it is performed within a distinctive and relative social context. Current assumptions about entrepreneurial masculinity derive from a fusion of social stereotypes and long-held, though empirically untested, pre-conceptions. This has positioned the assumed identity of hegemonic entrepreneurial men as necessarily individualistic, ruthless, aggressive and competitive (Hamilton, 2013: 91; Marlow and Swail, 2014: 82). Here, we are able to challenge and expand on assumptions in extant literature relating to how hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is performed and enacted.

### **Fieldwork, Field and Participants**

In order to investigate the way entrepreneurial masculinity is performed, the first named author conducted ethnographic research into predominantly middle-class, male small-business owners between January 2014 and May 2014 in *The Magpie*. Significantly, by ethnographic research we do not simply mean that observations of enterprising men occurred. Instead, we mean that these

observations were systematically recorded and analysed, to induce empirically valid findings in mind of our ontological approach to gender, entrepreneurial identity and performance. Hence, we acknowledge the distinction between data established through ethnography as oppose to participant observations articulated by Feldman (2011: 376-377). In all, the data analysed below is derived from 14 pub visits with a group of men ranging from quiet evenings with three, to the full group of ten. Watson (2010: 206) positions ethnography as ‘a research practice in which the investigator joins the group, community, or organization being studied, as either a full or partial member, or both participates in and observes activities’. In line with this definition, the researcher drank alcohol, shared jokes and talked about their business activities, sport and general banter. Given the social nature of the research site, other people were talked with as part of the ethnography, including bar staff, and other female and male customers.

The researcher is well known to some of the research participants as an academic researcher, and also because he is a member of the local golf club, where a number of participants also play. Access, which was established via a direct request to observe and be part of Friday nights, was also helped by the men being intrigued by the researcher’s own entrepreneurial efforts in attempting to launch an insect-based protein food supplement range in 2010. These factors, coupled with the researcher’s maleness, whiteness and shared localism, facilitated access and helped develop rapport with the group, which in turn potentially improved the quality of data since conversation flowed freely and the men’s performances were uninhibited (see Heley, 2011, for a discussion on why conducting ethnographic research ‘as a local’ in a semi-rural pub is advantageous methodologically). Yet, it is worth stressing that because the researcher is a ‘local’ male, he researched participants from a particular gendered identity position. This, in turn,

impacted how participants behaved in front of the researcher, and the version of masculinity that the researcher captured, documented and analysed. It is worth noting that a female researcher may, by virtue of their gender, have produced radically different data.

Although formal participant observation ended once sufficient data for the analysis had been collected, the first named author continues to frequent *The Magpie* and engage with the research participants. However, to ensure an ethical stance, it is only data from the research period that is included in this analysis. Overall, these conversations and observations provide access to the intersection of, and relationship between dramaturgical performance, hegemony, masculinity and entrepreneurship.

Throughout the fieldwork the researcher would type any observations made about how the men perform entrepreneurial masculinity into the note application of an iPhone. These notes were then written up onto the *Ethnograph* computer package, which helped group observations into 'key theme' categories. In all 17 sides of A4 observations notes were collected in this manner. The *Ethnograph* software was also used to count which of the key themes occurred more frequently in conversations. Whilst enumeration in this manner is by no means synonymous with centrality and importance, it does help the researcher to avoid over-emphasising the extraordinary in their analysis (Burrawoy, 1998) by placing observations into context. This approach allowed the authors to provisionally order and make sense of the data that was collected. Importantly, this enumeration did not drive or dominate the analysis, but complimented more traditional interpretivist techniques. Once data were coded and categorized into key themes, the authors ranked each theme in order of importance and centrality from 1 –

10, with 10 being the most important in terms of demonstrating how entrepreneurial masculinity is performed by the men. There was a natural, somewhat serendipitous, general correspondence between interpretive importance and centrality and the numerical frequency. For the purposes of this paper, the four most centrally important and consistently observed themes that our data is grouped within are reported on. These themes are elaborated on in Table 1.

Table 1 here: Key themes on the performance of entrepreneurial masculinity:

(See attachment entitled ‘Figures’, table 1).

Zahara (2007: 45) suggests that few studies about entrepreneurship give enough empirical context about the people and place under scrutiny (see, also, Welter, 2011: 125). The specific context of this research is quite unusual in entrepreneurship research, though a previous study by Reveley et al. (2004) showed that spatial fixation on the business office as a site of research was limiting when investigating entrepreneurial action, and that homes, pubs and other work sites can provide access to different performances, thus creating a richer context for analysis. The context for this research, a particular space at *The Magpie*’s bar on Friday evenings saw the men congregate to drink, ‘discuss business’, and talk sport.

*The Magpie* does not organise meetings or advertise the fact that local business people use the space. Rather local businessmen established a routine of going there a number of years ago. This routine now functions as a long-standing though unofficial ritual and tradition. No women attended this particular part of the pub during the fieldwork, although women did use other parts of the pub. Several local businesswomen who were spoken with in the pub implied that Friday

evenings was a bit of an ‘old boy’s network’, with a cliquey, stuffy and machismo culture. This area of the pub is a place that ‘deploys male power’ (Gottdeiner, 2005: 81) akin to the betting shops analysed by Cassidy (2014); it is ‘a place for men to come and do their thing’ and construct and perform masculinity, entrepreneurial or otherwise, largely independently of female gazes and influence. The space the men occupy facilitates the meeting of a localised, somewhat parochial male ‘entrepreneurial fraternity’ (Warren and Smith, 2009) who use *The Magpie* to indulge in a gendered, ‘soft’, community-based entrepreneurial network (Smith, 2011) which exemplifies the ‘public entrepreneurial patriarchy’ discussed by Reed (1996) and Mulholland (1996) (see, also, Bruni et al., 2004: 409).

*The Magpie* is located in the pseudonymous semi-rural North East town of Beachwood and is considered a relatively affluent area in an otherwise socio-economically disadvantaged region, defined by low levels of business start-up and self-employment (Levie and Hart, 2012). With a population of 14,000 Beachwood is made up almost entirely of white residents, and the pub attracts an almost entirely middle-class clientele. The particular group of men is a good sample to research in order to produce an insight into how entrepreneurial masculinity is performed for five reasons.

Firstly, most of the pub’s clientele are intermittent users, whereas the group studied have been consistent, regular customers for many years. The men proudly said that they are amongst ‘the first to arrive and the last to leave’. As such, the group sees the pub as important, ritualised part of their lives and, as we shall see, a key stage for their gender and entrepreneurial performances. Secondly some group-members are successful, especially in comparison with other local

businessmen. Their success is evidenced by them winning local prizes for their business efforts, being invited to speak at and attend 'invitation only' local business dinners and - in two cases - being named in the business section of newspapers. The demonstration of success is a key part of how participants perform their identities. Thirdly the men seem to personify the white, middle-class, middle-aged entrepreneurial cultural stereotype discussed by Ogbor (2000) and hence the group is potentially indicative of how other middle-aged, white, male entrepreneurial actors publically enact a fusion of their roles as entrepreneurs and men more generally. Fourthly, the men perform a distinctive *entrepreneurial* masculinity in *The Magpie*. As well as projecting success, the men focus on talking business, while other men in the pub focus on consuming alcohol and general socialising. As Tom explained in a text: '[Friday nights in *The Magpie* are] not about hoying [throwing] a load of drink down our necks, it's just a great chance to have a couple of beers with like-minded lads and talk about business away from the normal pressures, it's not about us being drunk' (very similar Friday night 'business' drinking has been described in Down, 2006: 79-81, also reported in Reveley et al., 2004). Being seen as successful, respectable local businessmen, and not 'drunks' was important to this group, and this is reflected in their performances. Finally, the men project a self-conscious and distinctive group identity. This happens through their use of a Facebook site entitled 'business in Beachwood', being members of the local Chamber of Commerce, and through their dress-sense. Though not ubiquitous in the group the wearing of tweed jackets and/or golf attire was common enough for other men in the pub to call them 'the tweed jacket brigade' and 'the golfers'.

Thus, the group represents a cliquey, distinctive, 'respectable', 'successful', and somewhat stereotypical (Ogbor, 2000) cohort of male small business owners. The men all own small



business ventures that employ less than five people and which range in age from 5 to 35 years (appendix A provides further details of participants' businesses and characteristics). The ventures are not defined by high-growth. Nor are group-members examples of the innovative 'mavericks, hero figures and lone wolves' (Warren and Smith, 2009: 48) that entre-tainment (Swail et al., 2013) depicts and glamorises. Instead their enterprise is of a mundane, 'everyday' nature (Down, 2006; Johannisson, 2011; Watson, 2013b: 406) and likely to remain defined by high levels of uncertainty (Henrekson and Johansson, 2010), contingency in uncontrollable market conditions and luck (Hmieleski and Baron, 2009) and a level of optimism and chance (Storey, 2011) within a somewhat depressed local semi-rural economy.

'The link between ownership and entrepreneuring is something to be investigated in research, rather than something to be taken for granted' (Watson, 2013: 27). Hence, just because the men are small business owners does not mean they are necessarily 'entrepreneurs' (Davidsson, 2008). Following Spedale and Watson (2013: 1) we define an entrepreneur as 'a person with particular personal characteristics or traits that led him to become dissatisfied with working as an employee in a standard organisation, so that he sought new business opportunities and, having done this, established a new (even novel) business'. The men are also defined by 'entrepreneurial ability' (Hobbs, 1988: 140), which means they are open and able to making money in novel and opportunistic ways. For example, Jack, a property developer and rentier, bought 'fish for cheap from the fish market ... and sold the fish around the doors' of homes in Beachwood 'to make some money as a teenager'. Similarly Tom (interior design) and Robert (chimney sweep and fireplace installer) both talked about 'starting a micro-brewery to sell on alcohol I make' and

‘make money from tree-felling ... there’s a lot of trees around here to make money from!’ on top of their established businesses.

## **Findings**

We now discuss the four most empirically central, consistent and thus germane (Emerson et al., 1995) findings about how the men performed entrepreneurial masculinity.

### ***Hierarchy***

The most central and common talk in the pub came under the theme of ‘hierarchy’. In total 42 examples relating to hierarchy occurred and were noted. A strong sense of hierarchy exists among the group and directly influences the way members, as individuals and a collective, perform entrepreneurial masculinity. These observations suggest that the men see and talk of themselves as existing in a hierarchy, with business success, in terms of size of business and wealth, as the key status criteria. Hence while aspects like physical size or age may determine the way hierarchies operate among men in some social contexts, in *The Magpie* it is purely a man’s business acumen and success that is used to establish status.

This hierarchy, derived from the men’s talk, is nevertheless a conceptual narrative (Somers, 1994), not an explicit and formal social arrangement. At the top of this hierarchy are two men who are part of Beachwood’s local ‘business elite’. Below them are three men who we labelled as ‘nearly men’. Though still highly respected within the group, they are submissive to the men at the top. Next come three men who exist in the ‘know our places’ category. These men are deferential to those above them and were often particularly condescending to the two men

positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy, who we have labeled the 'in awe' category. These two in awes are the least successful businessmen, with one in awe member – Lee, a 36 year old barbershop owner - being the youngest and most inexperienced male in the group. In awe men are somewhat sycophantic towards the nearly men and the business elite, and appeared almost honored to be able to socialize with them. Table 2 illustrates this hierarchy further.

Table 2. Hierarchical conceptualization entrepreneurial masculinity

(see attachment entitled 'Figures')

Peter and Jack, the business elite, would be given more time to speak, interrupted the others more and were interrupted the least. They were also never teased or ridiculed in the way those lower in the hierarchy were. Though expressed in humorous ways, those lower down were often teased, ridiculed and accused of being 'lightweight' in business and other cultural markers of masculinity such as sporting and sexual abilities.

The opinions of the higher status men were almost always agreed with and replicated by the others. This was made particularly clear during a discussion on social welfare. The first named author explained that he had published an article on welfare and referred to a town near Beachwood where he had conducted research. Tom – a nearly man - stated he thought welfare should be banned in the UK. Other participants looked at Peter and Jack, the business elite, before responding. The researcher then explained why he thought this was unreasonable, to which a business elite, Peter, said 'what you say is right'. Following this affirmation they all agreed including Tom who explained his *volte face* thus: 'because I've heard you speak about it I

also agree welfare shouldn't be banned'. The men perform entrepreneurial masculinity in a hierarchical dynamic that has a small number of 'directors' (Goffman, 1959: 75-76) dictating who is able to speak, when they are able to do so and what is said.

Friday nights were full of talk about expensive commodities, which were used as key Goffmanesque props to demonstrate their entrepreneurial success and position them in the group hierarchy. Two commodities dominated this talk: cars and 'wads' of cash, which acted as emblems, extensions and affirmation of participants' successful entrepreneurial masculinity. Expensive cars feature in other accounts of entrepreneurial pub banter, notably as a form of play between owners and employees about the rewards within the employment relationship (Reveley et al., 2004: 359). Driving a new German sports car with a private registration-plate was seen as particularly commendable and a sure way of signaling a higher position in the hierarchy. All of the men would bring and display large amounts of cash with them to the pub. Carrying and displaying cash and offering to buy drinks from their very publically displayed 'wads' of cash signifies wealth and entrepreneurial success and a way of showing that they are successful entrepreneurial men who warrant respect from other men in the pub.

Intrigued by the carrying of cash the researcher asked Tim why he did this. He explained that he goes to the bank takes out the amount he and his family 'need for the week to pay bills and buy food for next week'. Tim distributes cash to the rest of his family when he gets home from *The Magpie*. The fact that Tim is so keen to show the cash to others, fully aware that he will not need this amount, illustrates the extent to which it acts as a visual symbol or artifact of entrepreneurial success (and masculinity). In the same way that lifting heavy weights and displaying bigger

muscles is a way for male bodybuilders to visually demonstrate their hegemony and status in the culture of gymnasiums (Klein, 1993) - where physical size and strength act as the basis of dominant masculinity and its performance – in *The Magpie*, where financial success through entrepreneurship determines hegemony, material markers are seen as culturally viable ways for enterprising men to demonstrate their hegemonic status.

Bruni et al. (2004: 409) also note this when they state that ‘The entrepreneurial literature has never concerned itself with exploring the power relations comprised in economic structures ... However, the construction of entrepreneurship as a form of masculinity has not worked simply through male bodies. It has also and especially come about through the images and representations associated with masculinities’. A clear power structure exists among the men when they meet in an informal economic context. This structure has ‘come about’ (ibid.) by some men being able to enhance and legitimize their performance of entrepreneurial masculinity by using the cultural insignias of cars and cash to demonstrate their success and thus their status as entrepreneurs, while other men are less able to do this and are therefore less hegemonic in their performance. Thus, ones’ performance of entrepreneurial masculinity in *The Magpie* must allude to and evidence ones’ success – whether fictitious, or real and demonstrable - through materialistic and superficial though culturally accepted markers of hegemonic masculinity. Cars and cash are social symbols of contemporary western masculinity. By positioning their entrepreneurship as a vehicle that delivers such symbols, participants’ identities as successful entrepreneurs and successful men become harmonized.

### ***Winning***

The second most central and consistently identified theme relates to how the men position themselves as ‘winners’ as a result of their entrepreneurialism. Twenty-two examples of ‘winning’ were noted. The men would often greet each other and start conversations by asking ‘how business is going?’ to which the answer ‘I am winning’ is ventured in a clichéd (Down and Warren, 2008), almost inevitable way. ‘Winning’ subsumes a broad range of other talk, which forms part of their masculine entrepreneurialism. The men are not just winning (i.e. making money), but they are also demonstrating through this talk an ability to provide for their family through entrepreneurship (as well as for themselves through the buying of expensive cars). This finding was made especially clear through Jack’s pride at being able to send his children to an expensive local fee-paying school. Each week Jack would emphasise, to the approval of the others, the ‘eye watering’ amount it costs him to do this. Similarly, the others were quick to boast of things like gifts and holidays they could afford as a result of their entrepreneurial incomes. To ‘care’ for the family in this way signifies a somewhat traditional, even patriarchal, masculinity defined by self-sacrifice and the ability to provide. As with other studies where self-sufficiency and autonomy feature as key aspects of entrepreneurial identity (Down, 2006), the men all admire each other’s masculine ability to provide through their entrepreneurialism, and their performance of this is a key feature of their talk.

‘The construction of entrepreneurship as a form of masculinity has ... come about through the images and representations associated with masculinities, some of which are more aggressive and geared to personal profit, others being more altruistic and intended to ensure the economic well-being of one’s family (Reed, 1996)’ (Bruni et al., 2004: 409-410). In *The Magpie*, it is this type of altruistic entrepreneurial masculinity, linked with ideals of providing for one’s loved ones

with the money generated by the business, that is admired and is therefore enacted by the group's members. Yet, this altruism is also fused with an ability to provide for oneself through status symbols like cars; thus aligning the men's entrepreneurial actions around 'personal profit' (Bruni et al., 2004: 409). In short, it is the acquisition of capital that is primarily admired and treated as a marker of masculinity. Sometimes spending is framed altruistically, sometimes in a more solipsistic way.

### ***Them and Us***

The third theme identified relates to how the men collectively juxtapose their positions and identities as entrepreneurs in a semi-rural town with those of male entrepreneurs in both local and non-local urban areas. The men frequently (19 examples of this talk in all) expressed the notion that businessmen in more urban areas failed to take them and their businesses seriously. In these reports the men seemed to be defining their engagement with 'city people' and 'townies' as showing a lack of respect to their status and achievements, and hence it can be seen as a threat to their masculinity. Aside from talk about the way that 'city people' generally underestimate the talent-pool in semi-rural communities there were more specific reports of the men taking pride and pleasure at stories of how they, or other local business people in Beachwood ('us'), 'got one over' on city-based business men ('them'). Peter, one of the elite, told one story of how an expensive though apparently incompetent London-based solicitor was made to look foolish by a local solicitor who Peter paid 'only thirty-five pounds to' to avoid some potential legal trouble. Similarly Peter fondly recalled how he sold part of his hydraulics business for an inflated price to some 'buyers from London'. Although the buyers thought they could intimidate Peter into selling his company cheaply ('they thought I was a country bumpkin from the Northern backwaters')

ultimately he was able to hurry the buyers into a deal that benefited him and apparently ‘even made page three of *The Financial Times*’.

Through these stories the men (us) use their under-dog status to outdo businessmen (and never women) located in more urban settings (them), and in so doing affirm and bolster their identities as entrepreneurial men. Accordingly, any threats to masculinity that the men experience due to their sense of marginalization are alleviated to some extent. Entrepreneurial masculinity is defined by ‘a natural tendency to be competitive’ (Bruni et al., 2004: 409), and this is also apparent in *The Magpie*. However, it is important to note that the form of hegemonic masculinity enacted in *The Magpie* sees the expression of competition and victory against other men as valid, but, apparently, not competition against women, which was never expressed. This further reflects a gendered view implicitly held by participants, namely that their entrepreneurial masculinity is linked with their ability to altruistically provide for significant females in their lives (wives, daughters, etc.) but not the ability to compete with enterprising females they encounter. This chauvinistic attitude is then perhaps more a reflection of attitudes conditioned by their semi-rural location and their generation: the men have been conditioned to perform an entrepreneurial masculinity with a culturally prescribed doxa (Smith, 2010) that does not see females as ‘fair game’ to position oneself and compete against.

### ***Walter Mitty***

The theme of Walter Mitty (15 examples) dominated the talk on the final evening of fieldwork. Walter Mitty, named by the group after the fantasist film character, was a well-known local man who visited the pub on numerous occasions previously and had expressed a desire to ‘do



business' with a number of the men. Mitty claimed to be a barrister, then a solicitor, then a local businessman ('Walter Mitty' subsequently presented himself as an MI5 agent in other pubs in Beachwood, though not *The Magpie*, from which he is now banned). On this evening the extent of Mitty's deceptions were revealed, and the men reflected on the unrespectable sort of masculinity he symbolised. Some of the men had hoped to explore potential business opportunities with Mitty, and much of the talk that night saw the men looking to distance themselves, and their reputations, from him. Being taken in by Mitty clearly represents a potential threat in this sense, and their talk that night was aimed at rationalizing their status as experienced, non-naïve entrepreneurial men.

Throughout the fieldwork the men criticised performances of masculinity which they perceived as wrong, weak or deviating from the hegemonic form of masculinity they wish to display. On one evening, for instance, the researcher and Simon, a nearly man, were completing a Sudoku puzzle in a broadsheet newspaper in the pub. The other men started 'taking the piss' on the premise that this was symbolic of a 'nerdy' masculinity. However, such acts – though 'nerdy' and subject to ridicule, were not a serious source of alienation. Such behavior could, of course, be excused for the researcher, as it was expected. Nonetheless, Walter Mitty's antics resulted in him becoming 'like a leper, to be avoided at all costs' (Robert). Mitty had crossed the line between respectable and non-respectable entrepreneurial masculinity and was thus ostracized. By definition hegemonic masculinity 'is a discursive practice which tends to marginalize those men who do not fit the construct' (Bruni et al., 2004: 409).

Earlier accounts have shown how central notions of respectability are to people's gendered performances. For example, Skeggs' ethnography (1997) shows how working class women align their identities to versions of womanhood they see as respectable, in their quests to acquire a higher level of status over time. Similarly, Duneier (1992) illustrates how a cohort of black men perform a form of masculinity they define as respectable through various cultural acts. The men studied in *The Magpie* also see respectability as being a key part of the entrepreneurial masculine identities they perform there. Without a sense of respectability, the men and their enterprises will lack a legitimate and authentic status. Because Mitty fails to comply with a definition of respectable entrepreneurial masculinity on the basis of his deception, he is entirely marginalized by the group. In this way, respectable masculinity in *The Magpie* remains somewhat elitist: something only certain men can perform. As was the case for some of Duneier's participants, who framed their respectability around 'who they are not' as well as 'who they are', being a respectable enterprising male in *The Magpie* is partly about juxtaposing oneself against and vilifying non-respectable men.

## **Conclusion**

Like others (Down, 2006; Down and Warren, 2008: 10; Watson, 2010: 205; Smith, 2011; Watson, 2012b: 16) we have used ethnographic data to provide a systematic insight into an aspect of contemporary enterprising behavior. Empirical research on entrepreneurial agents has traditionally occurred in mundane, regulated spaces where entrepreneurship is performed, such as offices, factories and boardrooms. However, more recent analysis recognizes that there are informal leisure spaces where entrepreneurial agents meet in which key entrepreneurial performances happen (Down, 2006: 68; Watson and Watson, 2012: 684). Hobbs (1998), Reveley

et al. (2004), Down (2006), and Watson and Watson (2012) all use the informal space of a pub (or wine bar, Smith, 2011) as a key site to elicit uniquely rich, close-scale data about how enterprise-related ‘things work’ (Watson, 2010). Likewise, our work has used the social context provided by *The Magpie* pub to analyse the performance of entrepreneurial masculinity, affirming the diversity of spaces that are relevant sites for contemporary ethnographers of enterprise. Through our ethnographic data, we have provided a much-needed ‘explicit discussion of men and masculinities within entrepreneurship’ (Marlow and Swail, 2014: 91) by demonstrating how a notion of hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is ‘done’, negotiated and performed. By so doing we have made the performance of masculine entrepreneurial identity – or at least one version of it - visible at a time when entrepreneurial masculinity is largely analytically and empirically ‘invisible’ in the entrepreneurship literature (Bruni et al. 2004: 407). Thus, we have fulfilled our objective, namely to provide an empirical insight into how masculinity, entrepreneurship and identity projection culturally intersect, based on observations of a cohort of men who ‘perform’ in the hope of giving their entrepreneurial identities a level of legitimacy. Our analysis can be seen as a response to existing calls for post-structuralist and interpretivist/constructionist (in our case specifically drawing from interactionism) examinations into the accomplishment of gender and entrepreneurship to emerge (Bruni et al., 2004: 423; Ahl, 2006; Ahl and Marlow, 2012: 550).

For the last thirty years studies of masculinity have shown that notions of masculinity are insecurely defined and enacted: it is rare that men are certain about how they ought to behave and perform ‘as men’ in a given temporal or spatial context (Connell, 1985, 1995; Kimmel, 2005; Beasley, 2012). However, *The Magpie* group’s sense of what ‘entrepreneurial masculinity’

means and requires at the dramaturgical level is clear to us and them. The men, inter alia, view their entrepreneurial masculinity as being defined by four things: 1) a sense of hierarchy, 2) a concept of ‘winning’ and providing through successful entrepreneurship, 3) a distinction between themselves (‘us’) and urban enterprising men (‘them’), and 4) the alienation of enterprising males who personify the wrong sort – i.e. non-respectable – of enterprising masculinity. These aspects of the men’s masculinity are fused with more generic and superficial markers of masculinity like ‘not drinking too much’, wearing conservative clothes, driving German sports cars and displaying cash. This ensures that they successfully dramaturgically synchronise their roles as men and entrepreneurs as part of an entrepreneurial fraternity (Warren and Smith, 2009) whose business lives are fused with and complimented by their leisure lives. The seemingly unambiguous notion of hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity, which the men enact on this particular stage, contrasts with other reports where ambiguity is the norm (e.g. the football hooligans analysed by Armstrong (1998), the transnational business men looked at by Connell and Wood (2005) and the metrosexual men described by Coad (2008)). Thus, in *The Magpie* a locally produced stereotypical ideal about what entrepreneurial masculinity is exists. This ideal functions as a ‘heuristic device ... constructed from situated cues that prescribe the behaviours, values, and actions that males perform ... if they are to be recognized as credible social actors’ (Greene et al., 2013: 689).

It is interesting to note that the sort of entrepreneurial masculinity we have described is, in part, altruistic in intent. Existing research positions entrepreneurial men as necessarily individualistic, ruthless, aggressive and competitive (Hamilton, 2013: 91; Marlow and Swail, 2014: 82), not paternalistically altruistic. The altruistic model of entrepreneurial masculinity depicted here

therefore deviates from existing, though empirically unexplored, depictions of enterprising men. Yet, altruism does not occur in isolation from acts that can be read as individualistic and competitive. While participants have different identities to each other in their lives outside of *The Magpie* (for example, the men own businesses of different repute and levels of pluriactivity and the men are of different ages) they manage to collectively agree upon and perform a remarkably cohesive version of entrepreneurial masculinity. This illustrates that the intersectionality – or interplay - identified by others in relation to the performativity of female entrepreneurs' identities (Ashcraft, 2009) appears to also apply to contemporary male entrepreneurs. Of course the particular 'staged' nature of the setting might be at the root of the lack of ambiguity we observe. A methodology which observed the men in multiple settings, or an interview research design which elicited more interiority, might produce less emphatic displays.

By demonstrating how participants enact and accomplish an entrepreneurial masculinity we have added to the ongoing project of uncovering, through ethnography, how gender and entrepreneurship culturally intersect. We have done this in three distinct ways, as we now consider in more detail.

Firstly we have challenged existing notions and extended ideas about how enterprising masculinity is performed. Currently, enterprising men are often portrayed schematically in extant research literature, as an essentialist and homogenous type, in line with the stereotypical, clichéd, media-depicted versions critiqued by Hamilton (2013: 91-96; 2014: 708). This has positioned the enterprising male as a somewhat solipsistic, aggressive individual, focused only on his own wealth, status and happiness (Hamilton, 2013: 91; Marlow and Swail, 2014: 82). This view is

epitomised by the ‘greedy’, ‘ruthless’, ‘bullish’, ‘risk-taking’ version of masculinity constructed and performed by stockbrokers and financial analysts during their time in the city of London, as analysed by Smith (2010). Yet this ‘cityboy’ style of masculinity is not what all enterprising men necessarily perform, even if dominant cultural representations suggest it is. Because past depictions of entrepreneurial masculinity have not generally derived from rigorous ethnographic analysis they have, perhaps, failed to demonstrate nuance, subjectivity and complexity associated with how entrepreneurial masculinity – or entrepreneurial masculinities – are actually performed in different contexts by different sorts of enterprising males. Here, we have provided ethnographically grounded insight to document the complex, multiple sorts of masculinities enacted, and rejected, by an enterprising male fraternity in a specific space and time.

A second contribution relates to how our findings may develop concurrent analysis into the identity and performances of female entrepreneurs. Current social constructionist debates in gender and entrepreneurship have predominantly focused on and reproduced one main critique: that ‘entrepreneurship is a masculine endeavor, and that entrepreneurial identity is more naturally male’ than female (Hamilton, 2014: 705; see also Marlow and Swail, 2014 for a review of this critical line of thought). Indeed Ahl and Marlow (2012: 544) suggest that the identity of the entrepreneurial man is so dominant and normative within the spaces where entrepreneurial things happen that ‘within an entrepreneuring epoch, women are positioned in deficit unless they acknowledge and subscribe to a masculinized discourse’. Thus enterprising women may feel that they need to replicate the ‘identity work’ that enterprising males practice (Marlow and McAdam, 2012) to remedy the fact that ‘just by not being men, women are positioned within deficit and are deemed problematic’ (Marlow and Swail, 2014: 81). However, because the ‘masculinized

discourses' and enactments that enterprising men actually display when they perform entrepreneurial masculinity are understudied or founded on media-depictions rather than empirical, specifically ethnographic, insight, existing research is under-determining exactly what female entrepreneurs replicate of male entrepreneurial behavior and identity construction. Without knowing how hegemonic entrepreneurial masculinity is enacted, informed statements about the extent to which female entrepreneurs position themselves against and take on entrepreneurial masculinity will be incomplete. This renders studies that suggest masculinized entrepreneurial stereotypes and their assimilation have a negative impact on female entrepreneurs (e.g. Eddleston and Powell, 2008) open to question on empirical grounds. This is also made clear by Bruni et al. (2004: 410):

'Indeed to study women entrepreneurs without examining the gender structuring of entrepreneurship is to legitimate the gender blindness which renders masculinity invisible and to turn masculinity into the universal parameter of entrepreneurial action. When masculinity is made invisible, the male entrepreneurial model is universalized and stripped of gender'.

Here, a model of entrepreneurial masculinity grounded in ethnographic data has been presented that future scholars can use to compare and contrast their own findings against.

Thirdly, our analysis has incorporated the theory of hegemonic masculinity into debates on gender and entrepreneurship, thereby addressing the theoretical limitations discussed by Hamilton (2013) and Smith (2010). Entrepreneurship is 'a discursive practice which tends to marginalize those men who do not fit the construct' (Bruni et al., 2004: 409). Enterprising men who enact the stereotypical and culturally constructed entrepreneurial ideal are potentially more

likely to be seen and treated as normative and dominant entrepreneurs, while those men who fail in this regard may be deemed as marginal or deviant. To date, analysis of hegemony and entrepreneurship has generally considered how female entrepreneurs lack a sense of hegemony and accordingly experience a disadvantage due to their gender (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Consequently, questions about how hegemony relates to male entrepreneurs and their performance have rarely been asked (see Bruni et al., 2004 and Smith, 2010 for exceptions). Here we have shown how the marginalization of some enterprising men (and the affirmation of other enterprising men) occurs in *The Magpie* due to the way localized notions of masculine hegemony impact upon participants and their performances. ‘Literatures within the fields of sociology, economics and politics’ came to be ‘drawn upon to analyse women’s experiences of entrepreneurship’ (Marlow et al., 2009: 139) to locate female entrepreneurs’ actions within sound theoretical frameworks. Similarly, it is necessary for appropriate theory to be transported from wider disciplines for the study of male entrepreneurs to deepen. Our use of the theory of hegemonic masculinity – the long-standing, pre-eminent theory relating to masculinity (Beasley, 2012) which has been used by scholars of entrepreneurship looking at gender ‘acritically’ if at all (Bruni et al., 2004: 410) - functions as a step in this direction.

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**Appendix A: a table that gives further insight into participants' features**

(See attachment entitled 'Figures').